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## SALON OF THE DILETTANTI—XII

### MUCK RAKING IN THE FINE ARTS

Baron Arpad de Poazthory, a Hungarian artist of noble name, if not noble ambition, was going to paint a series of pictures on the Smart



**YORKTOWN**  
By Jan V. Chelminski  
(Depicts uniforms—Deprecate it)

Set, the first of which had already proved—the more the pity—the “sensation” of the recently opened Kensington Art Gallery. The Reader had seen the work lauded in the press, and he was caustic in his comment. What were we to have next? he asked. Wasn’t it enough to have muck-raking in polities, and Standard oil, and beef, and society, without making the fine arts the vehicle of exposés?

Apparently not, for here was a combination of priest and painter, the Reverend Father Bernard Vaughan and the Baron Arpad de Poazthory, the one supplying the pointers and the other the paint, conspiring to do the slumming stunt in the name of the fine arts. It was an outrage on public patience.

Slumming? inquired one of the Dilettanti. They’re working the Smart Set, you know! It didn’t matter what or whom they were working, the Reader retorted. If they were exploring the sacristy, bent on refuse, they were slumming. It wasn’t necessary to go down into the gutter for soil or out to the stockyards for stench. Skeletons were in

closets and cesspools in back yards all over the world, and the Reader couldn't see the expediency of reformers in pulpit or reformers in paint troubling themselves to make charts of the same for the benefit of the masses.

Were we to have yellow ministry, and yellow art, as we now had yellow journalism?

Take a look at this delectable pictorial exposé, continued the Reader. Refined (?)—the Smart Set, you know—melodrama, about as true to fact as Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle" was to Packingtown. A young girl in a gambling joint and a middle-aged devil in dress suit, gloating over his prospective victim, tell a terrible story—"most convincingly," we are told. She rests her head on her hands and gazes "with horror-stricken eyes" over a card table. (What business had she there; and being there, what business had her sisters to know it?) She had to choose between two kinds of ruin, social or moral. (Rubbish. A little heroic treatment with a slipper might have ended the perplexity.) Behind her chair stands the ghoul in broadcloth, rubbing his hands in elation over his anticipated victory. (A priest's jab at the truth—give him the benefit of a doubt in the matter of sincerity—or an artist's register of facial contortion.) In the background, men and women—birds of a feather—all laughing, chatting, gambling—heedless of the impend-



A STREET RABBLE  
By A. E. Sterner  
(Hoi Polloi in a hubbub—Rare Material)



THE CHRISTENING  
By José Jiminez y Avendaño  
(Shows genteel life—Sneer)

ing tragedy. (A rare group to exploit in sermon or picture!) What was this? Cheap, melodramatic sensation. And they called it the central attraction of the great English art show! And this was the first of a series of fine arts exposés!

Father Vaughan had drawn up on paper suggestions for the series of pictures which the baron was to paint. Here were the others: 1. "The Debutante"—fresh, innocent and lovely, before she has been caught in the whirlpool of so-called smart society. 2. "The World"—The girl at the end of the season—tired and jaded with the weariness and uselessness of an idle, butterfly flutter through life. 3. "The Flesh"—Her marriage for money to a man she does not love. 4. "The Devil"—Events leading to the separation of husband and wife. 5. "The Deserted Child"—Pathetic human study. 6. "Death"—Two pictures—one the suicide of the poor little butterfly and the other the death-bed of the man with no friend near him. When the pictures are all finished—and the baron was reported to be working furiously at them—society would flock to see themselves depicted a la Father Bernard Vaughan!

Now what was the essence and outcome of these unsavory revelations, be they in print or pigment? Were they honest and helpful? William Morris once said, "Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?" So, practically, he ignored the crooked, and set himself the task of furnishing straight goods—something clean and cleansing, noble

and ennobling, worth looking at. Not a bad substitute for slumming, the Reader thought. He recalled a few words of Macaulay:

"We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodic fits of morality. In general, elopements, divorces and family quarrels pass with little notice. We read the scandal, talk about it for a day, and forget it. But once in six or seven years our virtue becomes outraged. We cannot suffer the laws of religion and decency



YOUNG FARM GIRL AT THE PUMP  
By Van Cauwelaert  
(Burdens of girlhood—Fine theme)

to be violated. We must make a stand against vice. We must teach libertines that the English people appreciate the importance of domestic ties. Accordingly, some unfortunate man, in no respect more depraved than hundreds whose offenses have been treated with lenity, is singled out as an expiatory sacrifice. He is in truth a sort of whipping-boy, by whose vicarious agonies all the other transgressors of the same class are, it is supposed, sufficiently chastised. We reflect very complacently on our own severity, and compare with great pride the high standard of morals established in England with the Parisian laxity. At length our anger is satiated. Our victim is ruined and heart-broken. And our virtue goes quietly to sleep for seven years more."

Macaulay was provincial and old-fogyish or he would not have written in such a vein of contemptible cynicism, went on the Reader, with arch irony. It might be that the British public has—or had in Macau-

lay's day—its seven-year virtue-shakes, superinduced by the plethora of ennui, or some better named causes that passed current as a sufficient excuse for disturbing the wonted order of things. But not so in America and elsewhere today.

Now the disorder was never epidemic—it only attacked the individual. Indeed, it never seized the individual with the fatal grip of St. Vitus, but toyed with him on occasions, as fainting was supposed to lay hold of belles at the opera. Many had seen an element of advertising in the readiness with which some ladies succumbed to swooning, and there had been shrewd people who had attributed a like motive to the moral throes of people who were always reaching out—or down—after unsavory tit-bits of fact or fancy and holding them up for public inspection.

There was something charnel in the mental and moral condition of these inquisitorial souls that would make them at least quasi-heroic, the Reader admitted, were it not that their best friends in the reform business were skeptical about the expediency of raking up refuse for other people to enjoy or spleen at. There were not a few reputable citizens in the world who had wives and daughters and sons to keep uncontaminated who had deprecated alleged exposes, in whatever form made, which tended to show a bond of union, if not of sympathy, between the church, the studio, and the dive. But these, the Reader continued in raillery, were to be regarded as the qualms of the half-hearted, and wholly unwarranted.

The essence of a dumping place, it had been urged, was in the stirring. Without this, healthy people in its vicinity would not know of its existence. It was the stirring that gave activity to microbes and odors, and made the place doubly a pest. And the residents in the neighborhood were not always inclined to thank the hero who bared his arms and tackled the stick for stirring purposes.

But why shouldn't they? continued the Reader in mock argument. He could see no reason why moral cesspools should be born to blush unseen and waste their fragrance on the desert air any more than a violet should be that was not supposed to be moral at all. There was, he admitted, something of a difference in the two cases. If a self-advertising breeze came along and stirred up the fragrance of the violet, the bees were attracted and they did get honey as a result of the windy tip. When, however, one of these hardy hearts of questionable policy entered the field with what he called his reform probe and stirred up the scum and sediment, those who ought not to be attracted were apt to be, with the result that they often had only a bad smell in the nostrils, a bad taste in the mouth, possibly a canker in the flesh and a warp in the mind.

It had often been pointed out—and history seemed to justify the charge—that while the reformer (?) flourished his stick the pool kept on fermenting; and when he got tired—or had had sufficient enjoyment or exercise—the pool just settled down and simmered on as usual; and when all was over, the result was—notoriety.

In a word, it was believed by those who had investigated and were competent to speak that the man who made a hullabaloo over his crusade against vice was not a Hercules who cleaned out the Augean stables, but some little fellow who dug about in the deposit; that he only created noisome unpleasantness. But the Reader thought it was something to kick up a stench, though it did make more people sick than sinless.

How about Anthony Comstock? asked one of the Dilettanti. An-



FRUIT PIECE  
By Mrs. S. Mesdag Van Houten  
(Mere imitation—but good form)

thony's all right, retorted the Reader. He sought to prevent displays of the noxious, without notoriety. It was the other fellows who were making the hullabaloo.

The Dilettanti called a halt on ridicule and sarcasm, but the Reader was inexorable. He believed in slumming—it gave the slummers, pictorial or otherwise, a peep into the dark side of life, satisfied a prurient curiosity, and furnished a theme for side talk and confidences ever afterward. It might do no good to the "slummed"—it never did—but it was an educator to those who invaded the purlieus of vice and wrong under police, or ministerial, or artistic guidance.

He believed in fishing up from the depths the sodden remains of depraved humanity—as these reformers did—and holding them out on a fork, a la *Rebelais*, before the faces of the innocent, who had been unfortunate enough not to be posted earlier in life; in making it known to the pure and unsuspecting that enormities ran riot at such and such a street and number, so that they might know and have a thought of evil



CATALONIAN FISHERFOLK  
By O. G. Torrent  
(Sweaty and sordid—Swear by it)

as they passed. Of course innocence was not character—the innocent required what the man with the stirring stick gave them. Youth needed posting. Our sons should be given a tip where they could find debauchery. And this, it would seem, was a reformer's duty. At least this was what many reformers thought their duty.

He believed—but it was needless, he said, to go into details. The man with a scent for the morally noxious was a power in the community. He thought perhaps that he was doing more good—or furnishing more entertainment—than he was, and some others were inclined to think he was doing more harm than good, and that he ought to be in better business. But be this as it may, we couldn't ignore him—he got into the papers and the exhibitions, and had his discoveries duly heralded.

We might not know who discovered the soothing power of the poppy, but we did know the discoverer of the upper-ten resorts where the poppy was transmuted into lack of character. Our daughters might not know where the abode of the saints was located—they didn't all listen attentively at church—but, provided they read the news and attended the salons they did know where the Magdelens resided and how they acted, or it was not the reformer's fault.

No, protested the Reader sarcastically, we didn't want the real or alleged reformers to go to sleep for seven years, as Macaulay says, or we should miss much that staid, respectable people thought we could do as well without. It was true that Nature screened her rankness, and that even the brutes had in a measure copied the example of their

silent preceptor. But we wanted the man with the stirring stick, though it might be, as many advised, only to chastise him.

To come back to Macaulay, Macaulay was wrong. There might be something ridiculous in a whole nation like the English nation being taken with a fit of morality. But we were different nowadays. Bernhardt sacrificed a curl on Mount Vesuvius to the spirit of press agency, and did it successfully. Why should not American, French, Hungarian, any-other-country artists do the same?

But then, and the Reader dropped his tone of raillery, there were some of us who liked to keep our literature and art clean, who relished seeing a rebuke administered, who would like to see such firms as Vaughan and De Poazthory put out of business. Burne-Jones, the younger, tried the same trick a few years ago. He gave a pictorial rendition of Kipling's "Vampire," a poem, by the way, more clever than conscientious. He hawked it over to this country, entered it at a private sales gallery, and wanted to charge a price for admission. He was turned down in his enterprise. Then he hired a six-by-six back room, and charged for a peep and a photograph—and drew a baker's dozen of the morbidly curious.

REPORTED BY THE SALON'S SECRETARY.



AN ORIENTAL SCENE  
By Eugene Fromentin  
(Frivolous and frolicsome—Frown)